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MERCHANT & GOULD PC
P.O. BOX 2903
MINNEAPOLIS MN 55402-0903

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APR 15 2004

In re Application of :
Michael Alan Maiers et al. :
Application No. 10/029,099 :
Filed: October 19, 2001 :
Attorney Docket No.: :
STL9968/40046.171USU1 :
Title: DISC DRIVE PRINTED CIRCUIT :
BOARD CONNECTOR LOCATING :
FEATURE :

OFFICE OF PETITIONS

DECISION ON PETITION

This is a decision on the petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a),¹ filed March 22, 2004, to revive the above-identified application.

Background

The above-identified application became abandoned for failure to reply within the meaning of 37 CFR §1.113 in a timely manner to the final Office action mailed November 12, 2002, which set a shortened statutory period for reply of three (3) months. On February 12, 2003, an after-final amendment was received, and on March 12, 2003, an advisory action was mailed. No extensions of time under the provisions of 37 CFR §1.136(a) were obtained. Accordingly, the above-identified application became abandoned on February 13, 2003. A Notice of Abandonment was mailed August 12, 2003.

¹ A grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a) must be accompanied by:

- (1) The reply required to the outstanding Office action or notice, unless previously filed;
- (2) The petition fee as set forth in § 1.17(l);
- (3) A showing to the Commissioner that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition was unavoidable;
- (4) Any terminal disclaimer (and fee as set forth in § 1.20(d)) required pursuant to paragraph (d) of this section.

With the instant petition, Petitioner has filed a Request for Continued Examination, the associated fee, the petition fee, and a statement of facts.

Petitioner has met requirements (1) and (2) above. Requirement (4) does not apply.

Regarding the first requirement, Petitioner has submitted payment in the amount of \$1,330.00. The fee associated with the filing of a petition under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) is \$130.00. If the petitioner wishes to have the excess \$1,200.00 refunded, she should submit a request for refund to the Office of Finance². A copy of this decision should accompany any such request.

As to item (3), the showing of record is not sufficient to establish to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that the delay was unavoidable within the meaning of 37 CFR 1.137(a).

The Commissioner is responsible for determining the standard for unavoidable delay and for applying that standard.

"In the specialized field of patent law, . . . the Commissioner of Patent and Trademarks is primarily responsible for the application and enforcement of the various narrow and technical statutory and regulatory provisions. The Commissioner's interpretation of those provisions is entitled to considerable deference."³

"[T]he Commissioner's discretion cannot remain wholly uncontrolled, if the facts **clearly** demonstrate that the applicant's delay in prosecuting the application was unavoidable, and that the Commissioner's adverse determination lacked **any** basis in reason or common sense."⁴

"The court's review of a Commissioner's decision is 'limited, however, to a determination of whether the agency finding was arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, or otherwise not in accordance with the law.'"⁵

"The scope of review under the arbitrary and capricious standard is narrow and a court is not to substitute its judgment for that of the agency."⁶

2 The Refund Branch processes all customer requests for refunds. It generally takes four to six weeks for a request to be processed and a check generated. All requests for refund should be sent to: Mail Stop 16, Director of the US Patent and Trademark Office, PO Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450. Office hours are Monday - Friday from 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM. To check the status of a request that has been filed please contact the Refund Branch directly at 703-305-4229.

3 Rydeen v. Quigg, 748 F.Supp. 900, 904, 16 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1876 (D.D.C. 1990), aff'd without opinion (Rule 36), 937 F.2d 623 (Fed. Cir.1991) (citing Morganroth v. Quigg, 885 F.2d 843, 848, 12 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1125 (Fed. Cir. 1989); Ethicon, Inc. v. Quigg 849 F.2d 1422, 7 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1152 (Fed. Cir. 1988) ("an agency's interpretation of a statute it administers is entitled to deference"); see also Chevron U.S.A. Inc. v. Natural Resources Defence Council, Inc., 467 U.S. 837, 844, 81 L. Ed. 694, 104 S. Ct. 2778 (1984) ("if the statute is silent or ambiguous with respect to the specific issue, the question for the court is whether the agency's answer is based on a permissible construction of the statute."))

4 Commissariat A L'Energie Atomique et al. v. Watson, 274 F.2d 594, 597, 124 U.S.P.Q. (BNA) 126 (D.C. Cir. 1960) (emphasis added).

5 Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 316, 5 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1130 (N.D. Ind. 1987) (citing Camp v. Pitts, 411 U.S. 138, 93 S. Ct.1241, 1244 (1973) (citing 5 U.S.C. 706 (2)(A)); Beerly v. Dept. of Treasury, 768 F.2d 942, 945 (7th Cir. 1985); Smith v. Mossinghoff, 217 U.S. App. D.C. 27, 671 F.2d 533, 538 (D.C. Cir.1982)).

6 Ray v. Lehman, 55 F.3d 606, 608, 34 U.S.P.Q2d (BNA) 1786 (Fed. Cir. 1995) (citing Motor Vehicles Mfrs. Ass'n v. State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co., 463 U.S. 29, 43, 77 L.Ed.2d 443, 103 S. Ct. 2856 (1983)).

The standard

“[T]he question of whether an applicant’s delay in prosecuting an application was unavoidable must be decided on a case-by-case basis, taking all of the facts and circumstances into account.”⁷

The general question asked by the Office is: “Did petitioner act as a reasonable and prudent person in relation to his most important business?”⁸

Nonawareness of a PTO rule will not constitute unavoidable delay⁹

The burden of showing the cause of the delay is on the person seeking to revive the application¹⁰.

A delay caused by an applicant’s lack of knowledge or improper application of the patent statute, rules of practice, or the MPEP is not rendered “unavoidable” due to either the applicant’s reliance upon oral advice from USPTO employees or the USPTO’s failure to advise the applicant to take corrective action¹¹.

A delay resulting from an error (e.g., a docketing error) on the part of an employee in the performance of a clerical function may provide the basis for a showing of “unavoidable” delay.

Such a showing should identify the specific error¹², the individual who made the error, and the business routine in place for performing the action which resulted in the error. The showing must establish that the individual who erred was sufficiently trained and experienced with regard to the function and routine for its performance that reliance upon such employee represented the exercise of due care. The showing should include information regarding the training provided to the personnel responsible for the docketing error, degree of supervision of their work, examples of other work functions carried out, and checks on the described work which were used to assure proper execution of assigned tasks.

A delay resulting from an error (e.g., a docketing error) on the part of an employee in the performance of a clerical function may provide the basis for a showing of “unavoidable” delay, provided it is shown that:

⁷ Id.

⁸ See In re Mattulah, 38 App. D.C. 497 (D.C. Cir. 1912).

⁹ See Smith v. Mossinghoff, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 U.S.P.Q. (BNA) 977 (Fed. Cir. 1982) (citing Potter v. Dann, 201 U.S.P.Q. (BNA) 574 (D.D.C. 1978) for the proposition that counsel’s nonawareness of PTO rules does not constitute “unavoidable” delay)). Although court decisions have only addressed the issue of lack of knowledge of an attorney, there is no reason to expect a different result due to lack of knowledge on the part of a pro se (one who prosecutes on his own) applicant. It would be inequitable for a court to determine that a client who spends his hard earned money on an attorney who happens not to know a specific rule should be held to a higher standard than a pro se applicant who makes (or is forced to make) the decision to file the application without the assistance of counsel.

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ See In re Sivertz, 227 USPQ 255; 256 (Comm’r Pat. 1985).

¹² Petitioner must identify the error which caused the delay. If the specific error cannot be identified, the petitioner must identify any and all possible causes and prove that any of them, if they were the true cause, constitute unavoidable delay. A full and complete discussion for each possible error must be presented. A full and complete discussion of each possible error must be presented. Petitioner is reminded that petitioner has the burden of proof.

- (1) the error was the cause of the delay at issue¹³,
- (2) a business routine was in place for performing the clerical function that could reasonably be relied upon to avoid errors in its performance; and;
- (3) the employee was sufficiently trained and experienced with regard to the function and routine for its performance that reliance upon such employee represented the exercise of due care.

See MPEP 711.03(c)(III)(C)(2).

An adequate showing should include (when relevant):

- (1) statements by all persons with direct knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the delay, setting forth the facts as they know them;
- (2) a thorough explanation of the docketing and call-up system in use;
- (3) identification of the type of records kept;
- (4) identification of the persons responsible for the maintenance of the system;
- (5) copies of mail ledger, docket sheets, filewrappers and such other records as may exist which would substantiate an error in docketing;
- (6) include an indication as to why the system failed in this instance, and;
- (7) information regarding the training provided to the personnel responsible for the docketing error, degree of supervision of their work, examples of other work functions carried out, and checks on the described work which were used to assure proper execution of assigned tasks.

The regulation and portion of the MPEP relevant to the abandonment of this application

37 CFR§ 1.135. Abandonment for failure to reply within time period.

- (a) If an applicant of a patent application fails to reply within the time period provided under §1.134 and §1.136, the application will become abandoned unless an Office action indicates otherwise.
- (b) Prosecution of an application to save it from abandonment pursuant to paragraph (a) of this section must include such complete and proper reply as the condition of the application may require. The admission of, or refusal to admit, any amendment after final rejection or any amendment not responsive to the last action, or any related proceedings, will not operate to save the application from abandonment.
- (c) When reply by the applicant is a bona fide attempt to advance the application to final action, and is substantially a complete reply to the non-final Office action, but consideration of some matter or compliance with some requirement has been inadvertently omitted, applicant may be given a new time period for reply under §1.134 to supply the omission.

[Paras. (a), (b), and (c), 47 FR 41276, Sept. 17, 1982, effective Oct. 1, 1982; para. (d) deleted, 49 FR 555, Jan. 4, 1984, effective Apr. 1, 1984; revised, 62 FR 53131, Oct. 10, 1997, effective Dec. 1, 1997]

¹³ Petitioner must identify the error which caused the delay. If the specific error cannot be identified, the petitioner must identify any and all possible causes and prove that any of them, if they were the true cause, constitute unavoidable delay. A full and complete discussion for each possible error must be presented. A full and complete discussion of each possible error must be presented. Petitioner is reminded that petitioner has the burden of proof.

MPEP 711.03(c) sets forth, in part:

A delay resulting from an error (e.g., a docketing error) on the part of an employee in the performance of a clerical function may provide the basis for a showing of "unavoidable" delay, provided it is shown that:

- (A) the error was the cause of the delay at issue;
- (B) there was in place a business routine for performing the clerical function that could reasonably be relied upon to avoid errors in its performance; and
- (C) the employee was sufficiently trained and experienced with regard to the function and routine for its performance that reliance upon such employee represented the exercise of due care.

See In re Egbers, 6 USPQ2d 1869, 1872 (Comm'r Pat. 1988), rev'd on other grounds sub nom., Theodor Groz & Sohne & Ernst Bechert Nadelfabrik KG v. Quigg, 10 USPQ2d 1787 (D.D.C. 1988); In re Katrapat, 6 USPQ2d 1863, 1867-68 (Comm'r Pat. 1988).

Application of the standard to the current facts and circumstances

In the instant petition, petitioner maintains that the circumstances that led to the abandonment of the application meet the aforementioned unavoidable standard and, therefore; petitioner qualifies for relief under 37 CFR 1.137(a).

In support thereof, petitioner has submitted, *in toto*:

We received the Office Action that was mailed to us on March 12, 2003. Upon reviewing the correspondence, and our docketing system, our findings are an error on our behalf. This docketing error was totally inadvertent.

Petition, page 3.

Petitioner has not: identified the error which led to the abandonment of this application; identified that a business routine was in place; included statements by all persons with direct knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the delay, setting forth the facts as they know them; proffered a thorough explanation of the docketing and call-up system in use; identified of the type of records kept; identified of the persons responsible for the maintenance of the system; provided copies of mail ledger, docket sheets, filewrappers and such other records as may exist which would substantiate an error in docketing; included an indication as to why the system failed in this instance, and; supplied information regarding the training provided to the personnel responsible for the docketing error, degree of supervision of their work, examples of other work functions carried out, and checks on the described work which were used to assure proper execution of assigned tasks.

As such, the petition must be **DISMISSED**.

Any renewed petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) must be submitted within **TWO (2) MONTHS** from the mail date of this decision. Extensions of time under 37 CFR 1.136(a) are permitted. The request should include a cover letter entitled "Renewed Petition Under 37 CFR 1.137(a)", and should address only the deficiencies set forth above. This is **not** a final agency action within the meaning of 5 U.S.C 704.

Petitioner may also wish to consider filing a petition to revive based on unintentional abandonment under 37 CFR 1.137(b)¹⁴.

¹⁴ A grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(b) must be accompanied by:

- (1) The reply required to the outstanding Office action or notice, unless previously filed;
- (2) The petition fee as set forth in § 1.17(m);
- (3) A statement that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply

The application file will be retained in the Office of Petitions for two (2) months.

Telephone inquiries regarding this decision should be directed to the undersigned at (703) 305-0011.



**Paul Shanowski
Senior Attorney
Office of Petitions
United States Patent and Trademark Office**

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- until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to this paragraph was unintentional. The Commissioner may require additional information where there is a question whether the delay was unintentional, and;
- (4) Any terminal disclaimer (and fee as set forth in § 1.20(d)) required pursuant to paragraph (d) of this section.